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context may encompass both facilitating and inhibiting forces, in the forms of relational resources and strain (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1998; Bouckennooghe, 2012; Cunningham, Woodward, Shannon, MacIntosh, Lendrum, Rosenbloom, & Brown, 2002). For example, high-quality relationships with a supervisor can provide resources that reduce employees' anxiety about organisational change, whereas the absence of such relationships may cause strain and generate negative change attitudes (Choi, 2011; Tierney, 1999). In this regard, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory—which explains the impact of employees' resources and strain on their work-related attitudes and behaviors during stressful situations (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002; Quinn, Spreitzer, & Lam, 2012)—may help clarify employees' attitudes in organisational conditions marked by high uncertainty (Ng & Feldman, 2012). However, its application in investigations of attitudes toward change has been limited (Alvaro, Lyons, Warner, Hobfoll, Martens, Labonte, & Brown, 2010; Bouckennooghe, 2010).

Therefore, we draw on COR theory to frame our investigation of how employee-supervisor relationships affect the formation of commitment to change. Relationships between employees and supervisors can facilitate change implementation, depending on whether employees perceive these relationships as helpful for coping with the uncertainty and complexity that accompanies change (Foster, 2010; Janssen, Lam, & Huang, 2010; Parish, Cadwallader, & Bush, 2008; Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012). A commonly examined characteristic of employee-supervisor dyads is the overall quality of the relationship (Basu & Green, 1997; Nystrom, 1990; Parish et al., 2008; Shin et al., 2012; Tierney, 1999), yet such quality may obscure distinct underlying dimensions that are relevant to the formation of commitment to change, including perceived fairness (interpersonal justice) in the supervisor's treatment of the employee during the change and the intensity (social interaction) of their exchanges. This distinction between fairness and intensity has not appeared previously in applications of COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011).

In the context of organisational change, *interpersonal justice* refers to the type of personal treatment that employees receive from supervisors during change implementation, namely, the extent to which they are treated with dignity, respect, and consideration (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991). Several meta-analyses indicate significant though weak relationships between employees' interpersonal justice perceptions and their affective commitment (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), which suggests the likely presence of moderators and mediators (Bernerth, Armenakis, Field, & Walker, 2007; Bouckennooghe, 2010; Wu, Neubert, & Yi, 2007). *Social interaction* instead captures the presence of intensive informal interactions between employees and supervisors that go beyond established formal channels (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Strong social interactions can help alleviate employee concerns about dysfunctional

processes in stressful work situations, such as radical change (Choi, 2011; Leana & Van Buren, 1999), yet its discussion in change literature has been sparse.

We also consider the extent to which employee–supervisor relationships are characterised by *relational conflict* (Raza & Standing, 2011; Rispens, Greer, Jehn, & Thatcher, 2011; Robinson & Griffiths, 2005). Relational conflict warrants additional inquiry, because disagreements and clashes that stem from interpersonal issues can deplete employees' energy, prevent them from coping effectively with change, and undermine effective change implementation (Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995, 1997). Drawing from COR theory, we propose that relational conflict mediates the relationship between interpersonal justice and commitment to change. We thus respond to calls to open the “black box” that connects employees' fairness perceptions with their commitment to change (Bernerth et al., 2007; Choi, 2011; Folger & Skarlicki, 1999; Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000).

In addition, following calls for research into the boundary conditions of successful change implementation (Oreg et al., 2011), we propose a moderating role of social interaction, such that it invigorates the mediating effect of relational conflict. Specifically, we theorise that intensive social interaction plays both functional and dysfunctional roles, depending on whether the employee–supervisor relationship is marked by high or low interpersonal justice. First, social interaction may invigorate the potency of high interpersonal justice to reduce relational conflict (Heide & Miner, 1992; Uzzi, 1997) and enable the positive energy generated in the absence of conflict to be channeled more easily into a stronger commitment to change (Leana & van Buren, 1999). Second, it may invigorate the conversion of low interpersonal justice into enhanced relational conflict (Murnighan & Conlon, 1991), and by sensitising employees to the negative emotions that accompany relational conflict, it may enhance the negative consequences of relational conflict in terms of reducing commitment to change (De Dreu & van Vianen, 2001). Together, these arguments imply a moderated mediation model, which offers a more refined framework for understanding employees' reactions to change (Bouckenoghe, 2010; Oreg et al., 2011).

## THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

### Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

In general terms, COR theory provides a framework that explains how employees handle stressful situations (Hobfoll, 1989; Quinn et al., 2012), which has been used to predict various work-related outcomes—such as workplace burnout (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998), work engagement (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, Schaufeli,

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2009), and organisational commitment (Lapointe, Vandenberghe, & Panaccio, 2011)—as well as behaviors beyond the workplace, including reactions to traumatic events, war, or disasters (Freedy, Saladin, Kilpatrick, Resnick, & Saunders, 1994). A basic tenet of COR theory is that the way people respond to external threats depends on the resources they have available for dealing with the stress that such threats provoke, as well as their ability to draw from, protect, or develop relevant resources (Hobfoll, 2001).

A critical mechanism in COR theory pertains to the overall energy that employees put into their work (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001; Quinn et al., 2012). When their energy levels are depleted by job demands or disruptive work-related events, including large-scale change (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006), employees' psychological defense mechanisms may break down, leaving them to resort to negative attitudes (e.g. burnout) or counterproductive behaviors (Hobfoll, 2002; Little, Nelson, Wallace, & Johnson, 2011). If employees instead can tap into resources that enable high energy levels, they produce positive work outcomes, such as engagement and organisational commitment (Hom, Tsui, Wu, Lee, Zhang, Fu, & Li, 2009; Little et al., 2011).

COR theory posits that personality-related resources determine such energy levels (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009), but it also highlights the pivotal role of employees' relationships with their supervisors (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). Previous research has tended to regard the quality of these relationships in broad terms (Shin et al., 2012), even if it may comprise several underlying dimensions, including perceived fairness (Maslach & Leiter, 2008) and intensity (Carmeli, Ben-Hador, Waldman, & Rupp, 2009). In response, we consider the roles of interpersonal justice and social interaction in the context of explaining employees' commitment to change.

Although originally rooted in stress concepts, COR theory indeed can explain recipients' reactions to change (Alvaro et al., 2010; Bouckennooghe, 2010; Shin et al., 2012), in the sense that organisational change typically induces high levels of stress that deplete employees' positive energy, so coping with new change-related demands becomes cumbersome (Hobfoll, 1989). In this context, change recipients should benefit from the presence of relationship resources, to the extent that those resources help them reduce their sense of anxiety or uncertainty due to change (Foster, 2010; Parish et al., 2008; Shin et al., 2012). Conversely, in the absence of such relational resources, change recipients may be less positively inclined toward the change and expend the majority of their energy protecting their own well-being rather than supporting the change (Bouckennooghe, 2010).

Drawing from COR theory, we argue that the levels of interpersonal justice and social interaction in employee-supervisor relationships function as key resources—or sources of strain, if they are low—that affect how

## RELATIONAL ISSUES IN COMMITMENT TO CHANGE 5

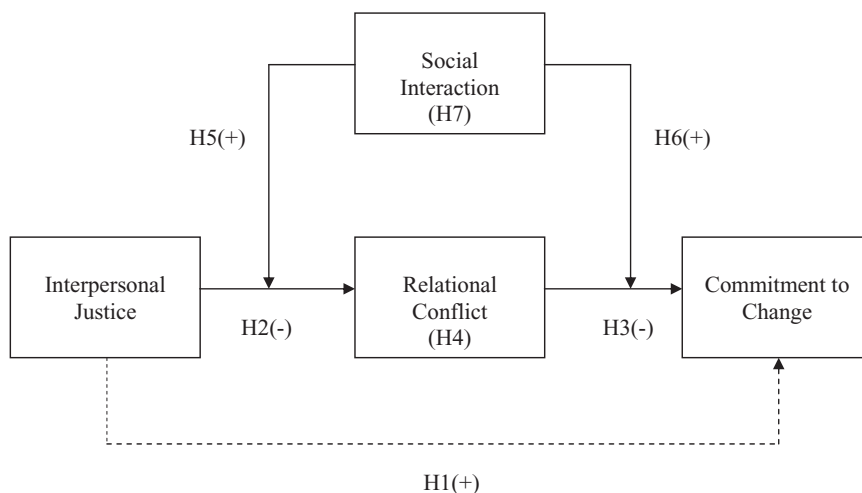


FIGURE 1. Conceptual model.

*Notes:* There is a direct positive relationship between interpersonal justice and commitment to change, but this relationship becomes insignificant when accounting for the role of relationship conflict. Therefore, relationship conflict fully mediates the interpersonal justice–commitment to change relationship.

employees react to the change. We also consider the role of relational conflict and the negative emotions that it tends to induce (Jehn, 1995, 1997), which may reinforce the stress that employees experience during change implementation. We predict that employees' relational conflict with their supervisors poses an additional burden that drains their energy levels during change implementation (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001; Quinn et al., 2012) and hence affects their commitment to change. In the following sections, we detail the conceptual framework we present in Figure 1 and outline the related hypotheses.

### Interpersonal Justice and Commitment to Change

Commitment to change is an extra-role attitude that exists outside the technical core of employees' jobs and serves the organisation by ensuring support for organisational change (Choi, 2011). Drawing from Meyer and Herscovitch's (2001) general theory of workplace commitment, Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) distinguish affective, continuance, and normative components of commitment to change. With our emphasis on the interpersonal relation between employees and supervisors, we focus on the affective

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component (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Affective commitment to change reflects employees' emotional buy-in, which is critically informed by the quality of their relations with significant others in the organisation, such as supervisors (Cobb, Wooten, & Folger, 1995; Neves, 2011; Nystrom, 1990; Tierney, 1999; van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008). By focusing on affective change commitment, we also respond to calls for more research on change recipients' feelings about a change, rather than just its objective characteristics (Bartunek, Rousseau, Rudolph, & DePalma, 2006; George & Jones, 2001; Huy, 2002). For parsimony, we use the general term "commitment to change" hereafter, rather than reiterate that we mean its affective component specifically.

For employees, organisational change creates heightened sensitivity to whether they are being treated fairly (Baron, Neuman, & Geddes, 1999; Rodell & Colquitt, 2009). In conditions of elevated uncertainty, induced by change, employees become "hypervigilant" and closely scrutinise the fairness of actions, or inactions, by others (Bouckennooghe, Vanderheyden, Van Laethem, & Mestdagh, 2007; Janis & Mann, 1977). Kirkman, Shapiro, Novelli, and Brett (1996) find that employees who are about to experience a team-based reorganisation are particularly sensitive to how fairly they felt the change would be handled. In light of our interest in the role played by the resources or strain associated with employee-supervisor relationships, we focus on one aspect of organisational justice, namely, interpersonal justice. This person-oriented dimension captures a key element of the personal treatment that employees receive from others in the organisation, including supervisors (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt, 2001; Judge, Scott, & Ilies, 2006; Masterson et al., 2000).<sup>1</sup>

We hypothesise a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of interpersonal justice and their commitment to change. COR theory predicts that high levels of interpersonal justice offer a relational resource that facilitates employees' ability to cope with organisational change. This resource helps reduce the stress, demands, and psychological costs that accompany change and instead fuels employees' positive energy to overcome the challenges (Hobfoll, 2002; Penney, Hunter, & Perry, 2011). Situations that invoke change typically create ambiguity in employees' work contexts and increase anxiety in their daily work (Bouckennooghe, 2012; Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). When supervisors treat employees with dignity and respect, such ambiguity and anxiety may be mitigated (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt,

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast, distributive justice perceptions reflect outcome-oriented comparisons of inputs with outputs, and procedural justice captures fairness in relation to participation in the change process. Informational justice is focused on the knowledge exchanged (Colquitt et al., 2001; Cropanzano, Prehar, & Chen, 2002).



2001). In contrast, low levels of interpersonal justice bring about relational strain, which undermines perceptions of psychological safety (Kahn, 1990). This sense of safety reflects a psychological condition of feeling protected and valuable (Edmonson, 1999). When employees believe they are *not* being treated with dignity or respect, organisational change likely harms their self-concept or well-being, which discourages them from supporting the change (Schein, 1996). Thus, we hypothesise:

*Hypothesis 1:* There is a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of interpersonal justice in their interactions with their supervisor and their commitment to change.

In addition to this direct effect, we consider potential mechanisms through which the effect might operate or conditions in which it is more likely (Bernerth et al., 2007; Colquitt et al., 2001; Fedor, Caldwell, & Herold, 2006; Wu et al., 2007). Specifically, we investigate the role of two critical, underexplored characteristics of employee–supervisor relationships in the context of change implementation: relational conflict and social interaction.

## Mediating Role of Relational Conflict

Relational conflict is a dysfunctional type of conflict that captures the “awareness of interpersonal incompatibilities [that] includes affective components such as feeling tension and friction” (Jehn & Mannix, 2001, p. 238). Extant research attributes several negative emotions to relational conflict, including anxiety, stress, suspicion, and resentment (Jehn, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999). Organisational change literature has devoted surprisingly little attention to the role of relational conflict. Yet interpersonal clashes and disagreements are typical elements of any radical change (Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Raza & Standing, 2011; Robinson & Griffiths, 2005), particularly when employees and supervisors have different ideas about how to achieve the goals of the change project (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Sonnenstuhl, 1996; Huy, 2002; Robinson & Griffiths, 2005).

The high quality of employee–supervisor relationships may decrease the likelihood of such emotional clashes though (Pondy, 1967; Roscigno & Hodson, 2004). According to COR theory, personal clashes and the associated negative emotions are *less* likely to emerge when employees have access to high-quality resources (Hobfoll, 2002). Interpersonal, fair-seeming relationships with a supervisor should enable employees to ward off negative emotions that might emerge during change implementation (Janssen et al., 2010), even if the two parties do not completely agree about the need for or

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1 outcomes of the change (Bacharach et al., 1996; Strebel, 1998). A recent  
2 study among nurses revealed that interpersonal justice decreased conflict-  
3 inducing responses to superiors (Almost, 2010). In contrast, at low levels of  
4 interpersonal justice, the relational strain that employees experience in inter-  
5 actions with their supervisor should activate negative emotions, such that  
6 relational conflict is more likely (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). Wall and Nolan  
7 (1986) note that conflicts often result from employees' perceptions of *unfair*  
8 treatment by leaders, such as lack of respect or unequal workloads. In short,  
9 when supervisors treat employees with dignity and respect, that treatment  
10 may act as a relational resource that diminishes the likelihood of relational  
11 conflict. In contrast, the relational strain stemming from disrespectful, decep-  
12 tive, or derogatory treatment by supervisors likely results in higher relational  
13 conflict. We thus posit

14  
15 *Hypothesis 2:* There is a negative relationship between the level of interpersonal  
16 justice and relational conflict in employee-supervisor interactions.

17  
18 The negative emotions that come with relational conflict in turn might  
19 compromise relationship outcomes (Amason, 1996; Choi & Sy, 2010; Pelled  
20 et al., 1999; Sy, Cote, & Saavedra, 2005). Extant research, outside the realm  
21 of organisational change, has indicated that relational conflict evokes nega-  
22 tive affect-laden feelings toward the organisation in general, as manifested in  
23 lower organisational commitment (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, &  
24 Sowa, 1986), as well as toward exchange partners (van Knippenberg, De  
25 Dreu, & Homan, 2004). Similarly, we hypothesise a negative relationship  
26 between the level of relational conflict and an employee's commitment to  
27 change.

28 According to COR theory, conflict-laden situations make employees more  
29 protective of their personal resources, such that they avoid overwhelming job  
30 demands that arise in such situations (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Hobfoll,  
31 1989; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Similarly, the negative emotions pro-  
32 duced by relational conflict may limit employees' cognitive ability to cope  
33 with the stress and ambiguity that surround challenging events such as  
34 radical change (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For example, relational conflict  
35 may limit employees' cognitive processing ability to deal objectively with  
36 information about the change (Pelled, 1996). Ultimately, the energy-  
37 consuming demands of relational conflict may increase employees' suscepti-  
38 bility to psychological distress during change implementation (Hobfoll,  
39 2002), such that the conflict reduces their commitment to change. In contrast,  
40 when they experience *low* relational conflict, employees can devote more time  
41 and energy to coping with the change rather than to restoring cohesion with  
42 their supervisors (Hobfoll, 1989; Jehn & Mannix, 2001), which should  
43 enhance their commitment to the change.



*Hypothesis 3:* There is a negative relationship between the level of relational conflict in employee–supervisor interactions and the former’s commitment to change.

Combining the preceding arguments, we expect that relational conflict plays a critical mediating role, such that the effect of interpersonal justice on commitment to change disappears, or at least decreases, when we account for the role of relational conflict. Any change situation involves potential relational clashes between employees and supervisors (Raza & Standing, 2011), which may reduce the former’s commitment to the change, but fair interpersonal treatment can alleviate such clashes (Roscigno & Hodson, 2004). In turn, the lack of such fair treatment will diminish the likelihood of commitment to change through the activation of emotion-laden personal clashes. Thus, relational conflict functions as a key mediator between interpersonal justice and commitment to change:

*Hypothesis 4:* The relationship between the level of interpersonal justice in employee–supervisor interactions and the former’s commitment to change is mediated by the relational conflict that marks these interactions.

## Moderating Role of Social Interaction

We also investigate how the aforementioned relationships may vary with the level of social interaction between employee and supervisor. Specifically, we theorise that social interaction moderates the negative relationship between interpersonal justice and relational conflict (see Hypothesis 2), the negative relationship between relational conflict and commitment to change (see Hypothesis 3), and the mediating effect of relational conflict between interpersonal justice and commitment to change (see Hypothesis 4).

Social interaction captures the strong informal relationships between employees and their supervisors, beyond formal work routines (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Interpersonal justice and social interaction may play complementary roles for reducing relational conflict. Although interpersonal justice can diminish the odds of relational conflict (Hobfoll, 2002; Janssen et al., 2010), respectful treatment by itself does not guarantee that employees know all the details of a change or its underlying reasons (Neves & Caetano, 2006). However, the enhanced communication quality resulting from strong social interactions (Larkin & Larkin, 1994; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998) may leverage the usefulness of fair interpersonal treatments for reducing relational conflict, because it helps employees better understand and appreciate how well they are treated by their supervisors (Leana & Van Buren, 1999). In a similar vein, Uzzi (1997) notes that socially embedded ties improve partners’ abilities to understand the causes of complex situations and undertake a successful exploitation of their high-quality exchange relationships. COR theory provides further

insight into this interplay between interpersonal justice and social interaction by acknowledging the nature of the energy generated by different levels of interpersonal justice (Hobfoll, 2002). More specifically, social interaction amplifies the effect of the positive energy or resources produced by *high* interpersonal justice, such that high-quality exchanges between employees and supervisors in the form of such justice are more easily channeled into reduced conflict levels when the two parties have strong social ties rather than weak ties (Hobfoll, 2002; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Furthermore, social interaction also amplifies the effect of the negative energy or strain caused by *low* interpersonal injustice, such that employees become more aware of the strain they experience when treated unfairly by supervisors (Hobfoll, 2002; Murnighan & Conlon, 1991), which in turn results in higher levels of relational conflict. Using these arguments, we expect that social interaction plays a key moderating role, invigorating the translation of higher interpersonal justice into lower relational conflict, and vice versa.

*Hypothesis 5:* The negative relationship between interpersonal justice and relational conflict in employee-supervisor interactions is moderated by the level of social interaction, such that the negative relationship is stronger at higher levels of social interaction.

Social interaction may invigorate the negative relationship between relational conflict and commitment to change too. Relational conflict is typically difficult to resolve, because doing so requires addressing issues that reflect people's personalities and life-long experiences (De Dreu & van Vianen, 2001). Some research has indicated that relational closeness may subdue the negative outcomes of relational conflict (Rispens et al., 2011), but intense interactions in exchange relationships also make conflicting parties more aware of their personal differences, such that they may focus more on their conflict rather than investing their energy in productive activities (De Clercq, Thongpapanl, & Dimov, 2009). Thus, when employees and supervisors interact more intensively, conflict situations are more likely to escalate and reinforce employees' negative emotions (Murnighan & Conlon, 1991). From COR theory, it follows that when the negative strain resulting from relational conflict is activated in conditions marked by high social interaction, the energy-depleting role of conflict gets invigorated, such that employees have limited ability to channel their energy to supporting the change (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). In turn, in the presence of strong social interactions, the high commitment to change that results from *low* relational conflict also should be reinforced. That is, the positive emotions in conflict-free situations can be leveraged more easily into positive change attitudes, because strong social interactions enable a better understanding of the motivations that underlie the change (Larkin & Larkin, 1994; Nahapiet &

Ghoshal, 1998), so employees are more motivated to channel their positive relationship energy into a strong commitment to change (Little et al., 2011).

Overall, stronger social interactions between employees and supervisors should make relational conflicts loom larger or seem intractable (Harinck, De Dreu, & van Vianen, 2000), such that the negative emotions that arise during interpersonal clashes translate more easily into a lower willingness to commit to change. In turn, stronger social interactions provide greater opportunities to leverage the positive emotions that prevail in the absence of such clashes into higher commitment to change.

*Hypothesis 6:* The negative relationship between the level of relational conflict in employee-supervisor interactions and the former's commitment to change is moderated by the level of social interaction, such that the negative relationship is stronger at higher levels of social interaction.

These arguments also suggest a moderated mediation effect, such that social interaction represents a critical boundary condition for the *indirect* effect of interpersonal justice on commitment to change through relational conflict (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). In particular, COR theory suggests that social interaction can have both functional and dysfunctional effects, depending on whether interpersonal justice is high or low. At high levels of interpersonal justice, social interaction plays a functional role in the formation of commitment to change, because it invigorates the potency of the positive energy levels associated with fair interpersonal treatments to lead to lower relational conflict and in turn enables the reduced relational conflict to prompt employees to grow more committed to change (Hobfoll, 2002). In contrast, at low levels of interpersonal justice, social interaction has a dysfunctional role: It invigorates the likelihood that strong relational conflicts emerge and then triggers such conflicts to translate into lower commitment to change. The invigorating role of social interaction, whether functional or dysfunctional, thus suggests the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 7:* The indirect effect of interpersonal justice in employee-supervisor interactions on the former's commitment to change through relational conflict is moderated by the level of social interaction, such that this indirect effect is stronger at higher levels of social interaction.

## METHOD

### Data Collection

This research focused on a distributor of a German car brand in Belgium that was undergoing a major restructuring process at the time of the data

collection. The restructuring entailed a transition to a structure based on cross-functional teams in each sales unit. This redesign of the organisation's structure aimed to improve the responsiveness and regional sales figures of each unit. Although everyone in the organisation was potentially affected by this large-scale change, we targeted employees who had to transition from working in a divisional group to operating in a cross-functional team (i.e. core change recipients). The focus on core change recipients limited the size of our population of potential participants ( $N = 102$ ) and thus reduced statistical power. However, it also ensured that each respondent was affected similarly by the change process, which mitigated potential bias due to differences in respondents' exposure to the change (Bouckennooghe, 2010).

We asked senior management to provide a list of employees most strongly affected by the transition, who had worked closely with their supervisors for at least three months. We captured data in two stages. First, employees were invited to complete an online survey that contained questions about the level of interpersonal justice, relational conflict, and social interaction they perceived in their exchanges with their supervisors (Time 1). Second, three weeks after the first questionnaire, employees completed a second online survey to capture data about their commitment to the change (Time 2). The use of a time lag between the measurement of the dependent variable and independent variables is a standard procedure to alleviate potential common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Limiting this time lag to three weeks reduced the likelihood that variance in commitment to change reflected unmeasured changes in the independent variables (Bouckennooghe, 2012).

Of the 102 employees, 77 responded to both questionnaires, of whom 86 per cent were men. The mean age of the respondents was 42.5 years ( $SD = 8.6$ ), and they had been working for the organisation for 15.7 years on average ( $SD = 9.2$ ). Further, 90 per cent of the participants had previous experience with large-scale organisational changes. Because of the relatively small sample size, we conducted an a priori power analysis to ensure that the data supported valid tests of the study's hypotheses. According to the procedures and effect sizes suggested by Cohen (1988), a recommended power of .80 for a multiple regression model with nine predictors and "large" combined effect size (Cohen's  $f^2 = .35$ , corresponding to  $R^2 = .26$ ;  $p < .05$ ) would require a minimum sample size of 54, less than our sample size of 77.

## Study Variables

To measure the focal constructs, we used previously validated items and 5-point Likert scales. We provide an overview of all the items in the Appendix.

*Commitment to Change.* Because our focus was on the affective component of employees' commitment to change, we used the six-item scale developed by Herscovitch and Meyer (2002). Sample items included, "I believe in the value of this restructuring", "This restructuring serves an important purpose", and "Things would be better without this restructuring."

*Interpersonal Justice.* This measure was based on Colquitt's (2001) four-item scale. The wording of the items referred to the restructuring process and the role of the respondent's supervisor, such as "To what extent was your supervisor respectful with you when discussing the new changes that result from this restructuring?" and "To what extent did your supervisor treat you with dignity during this restructuring?"

*Relational Conflict.* Following Jehn and Mannix (2001), we used a four-item scale to assess the extent to which interactions between respondents and supervisors were characterised by person-related conflict due to the restructuring. Sample items included, "During the restructuring there were often tensions in the relationship between the supervisor and myself" and "During the implementation of this change I often got angry at my supervisor."

*Social Interaction.* Following prior studies (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Yli-Renko, Autio, & Sapienza, 2001), we assessed social interaction with four items that reflected the intensity or strength of the social relationships between the employee and the supervisor, such as "My supervisor and I spend significant time together in social situations" and "I maintain a close social relationship with my supervisor."

*Control Variables.* Prior research has related gender, age, and organisational tenure to reactions to change (Caldwell, Liu, Fedor, & Herold, 2009; Devos, Buelens, & Bouckennooghe, 2007). To ensure that our findings hold, irrespective of these individual attributes, we incorporated them as control variables. In addition, we controlled for participants' experience with change using a dummy variable (0 = no; 1 = yes); previous exposure to major organisational changes may affect people's commitment to change (Devos et al., 2007; Rafferty & Restubog, 2010).

## Scale Reliability and Validity

In line with Anderson and Gerbing (1988), we estimated a four-factor measurement model using AMOS 20.0. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed that the measurement model fit the data well:  $\chi^2(129) = 153.51$ ; goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = .90; confirmatory fit index (CFI) = .98; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05; and standardised root

TABLE 1  
Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations for Study Variables, *N* = 77

	M	SD	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1.12	.33	–							
2. Age	42.50	8.62	–	–.21*						
3. Tenure	15.66	9.24	–	–.14	.77***					
4. Experience with change	1.88	.31	–	.13	–.23*	–.18				
5. Commitment to change	3.57	.74	.91	–.05	.08	.11	–.25*			
6. Interpersonal justice	3.71	.87	.91	.33**	–.01	–.03	.20*	.31**		
7. Relational conflict	2.06	.57	.76	–.18	–.16	–.15	.05	–.29**	–.41***	
8. Social interaction	2.70	.75	.71	–.01	.12	.16	.15	.10	.46***	–.02

\*\*\* *p* < .001; \*\* *p* < .01; \* *p* < .05.

mean residual (SRMR) = .07 (Schweizer, 2010). The significant factor loadings (*t* > 2.0; Gerbing & Anderson, 1988) and magnitude of the average variance extracted (AVE > .50; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988) provided evidence of the convergent validity of the scales. We also found support for the discriminant validity of the constructs: None of the confidence intervals for the correlations between constructs included 1.0 (*p* < .05) (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), and the AVE estimates of the constructs were greater than the squared correlations between corresponding pairs of constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As we show in Table 1, the reliabilities of the four focal constructs also were satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha values greater than .70. Finally, to test for common method bias, we estimated a CFA model in which all the indicator variables loaded on one general method factor. This alternative one-factor model yielded very low fit,  $\chi^2(135) = 433.35$  (135); GFI = .72; CFI = .71; RMSEA = .17; and SRMR = .19, indicating that common method bias was not a concern.

### Procedure for Hypotheses Testing

We applied Muller, Charles, and Yzerbyt's (2005) multistep approach to test the direct effects (Hypotheses 1–3), mediation effect (Hypothesis 4), and individual moderating effects (Hypotheses 5–6). To test the moderated mediation effect (Hypothesis 7), we relied on the holistic approach suggested by Preacher et al. (2007) and Edwards and Lambert (2007), which provides a direct comparison of the strength of indirect effects at selected levels of the moderator variable.<sup>2</sup> This approach encompasses a bootstrapping procedure

<sup>2</sup> Edwards and Lambert (2007) offer a detailed explanation of the statistical shortcomings associated with using classic, regression-based, stepwise procedures for testing moderated



that generates confidence intervals rather than point estimates for the indirect effects, thereby avoiding potential power problems caused by asymmetric and other non-normal sampling distributions of conditional, indirect effects—a particularly salient issue in the presence of small sample sizes (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). To test the moderating effects in Hypotheses 5–7, we calculated the mean-centered values of the interacting variables before multiplying them, to minimise multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991).

## RESULTS

In Table 1 we provide the descriptions of the study variables and their correlations; in Table 2 we list the regression results. The control model (not shown) accounted for 7 per cent of the variance in commitment to change and did not differ significantly from a null model,  $F_{\text{change}} = 1.28$ , *ns*. Only experience with change had a significant effect on commitment to change,  $\beta = -.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ; surprisingly, employees with previous experience showed less commitment to change than employees with no experience. Model 1 significantly improved on the control model, in that it explained 23 per cent of the total variance in commitment to change,  $F = 2.71$ ,  $p < .05$ . Model 3 explained an additional 10 per cent of the variance,  $F = 4.78$ ,  $p < .05$ . Finally, in Model 2, the control variables, interpersonal justice, social interaction, and their two-way interaction accounted for 31 per cent of the total variance explained in relational conflict,  $F = 2.71$ ,  $p < .05$ , or a 24 per cent incremental variance compared with its corresponding control model.

In support of Hypothesis 1, we found a positive direct effect of interpersonal justice on commitment to change,  $\beta = .40$ ,  $p < .01$  (Model 1). Hypothesis 2 also received support from the negative relationship between interpersonal justice and relational conflict,  $\beta = -.42$ ,  $p < .001$  (Model 2). Another negative relationship emerged between relational conflict and commitment to change, in support of Hypothesis 3,  $\beta = -.35$ ,  $p < .05$  (Model 3).

These three supported hypotheses also met the first three conditions for full mediation, according to Baron and Kenny (1986). In addition, a full mediation effect (Hypothesis 4) would exist if the effect of the independent variable (i.e. interpersonal justice) on the dependent variable (i.e. commit-

mediation. The structure of our conceptual model in Figure 1 resembles that of “Model 5” of Preacher et al. (2007, p. 194, Panel E) and the “First and Second Stage Moderating Model” of Edwards and Lambert (2007, p. 4, Panel D). These two procedures strongly overlap—both assess the indirect effects of interpersonal justice on commitment to change at selected levels of the moderator—though the latter also explicitly assesses and compares the individual moderating effects of social interaction on the interpersonal justice–relational conflict and relational conflict–commitment to change relationships (for a comparison, see Ryu, West, & Sousa, 2009).

TABLE 2  
Results of Moderated Mediation Analysis for Commitment to Change, N = 77

	Model 1 Criterion: Commitment to change		Model 2 Criterion: Relational conflict		Model 3 Criterion: Commitment to change	
	$\beta$	t-value	$\beta$	t-value	$\beta$	t-value
Gender	-.39	-1.38	-.03	-.12	-.26	-.99
Age	-.01	-.90	-.00	-.58	-.02	-1.13
Tenure	.01	-.77	-.00	-.62	.02	1.10
Experience with change	-.76*	-2.65	.06	.27	-.83**	-3.05
X: Interpersonal justice (IJ)	.40**	3.26	-.42***	-4.59	.23	1.69
MO: Social interaction (SI)	-.07	-.52	.26*	2.58	-.05	-.38
XMO: IJ $\times$ SI	-.00	-.02	-.18*	-2.13	-.03	-.30
ME: Relational conflict (RC)					-.35*	-2.08
MEMO: RC $\times$ SI					-.63**	-2.82
R <sup>2</sup>	.23*		.31**		.33**	
R <sup>2</sup> change (Model 3—Model 1)					.10*	

Notes: The symbols for the different variables follow Muller et al. (2005): X = independent variable; MO = moderator variable; XMO = two-way interaction between independent variable and moderator variable; ME = mediator; and MEMO = two-way interaction between mediator and moderator.  
\*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ .

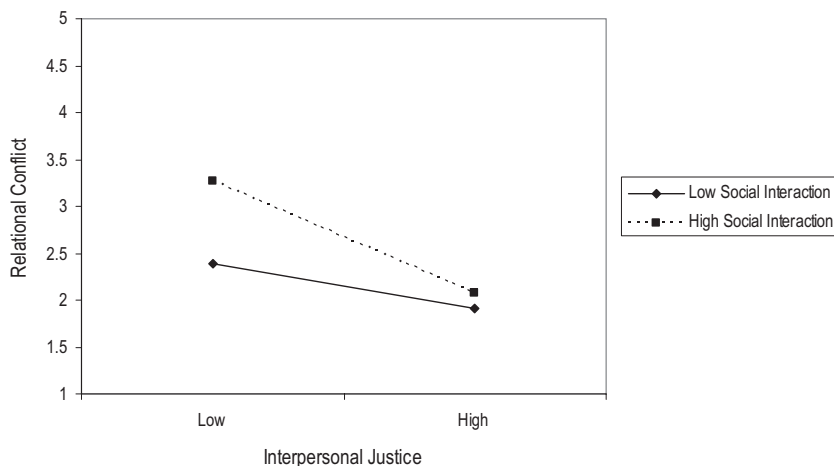
ment to change) disappeared when we controlled for the mediator (i.e. relational conflict) (Model 3) rather than excluding it from the equation (Model 1). We found support for this condition, because  $\beta = .23$ ,  $ns$ , in Model 3, whereas  $\beta = .40$ ,  $p < .01$ , in Model 1. A follow-up Sobel test (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon, Warsi, & Dwyer, 1995; Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001; Sobel, 1982) provided further evidence of a significant mediation effect, with a test statistic of 1.97, and  $p < .05$ .

In support of Hypothesis 5, the negative relationship between interpersonal justice and relational conflict was amplified by social interaction,  $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p < .05$  (Model 2). To explore the nature of this relationship, we plotted an interaction graph (Figure 2A) and conducted a simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991). The negative relationship between interpersonal justice and relational conflict was stronger with high,  $t = -4.37$ ,  $p < .001$ , than with low,  $t = -2.57$ ,  $p < .01$ , social interaction.

In Hypothesis 6, we argued that the negative relationship between relational conflict and commitment to change would be invigorated by social interaction. The interaction effect was significant and negative,  $\beta = -.63$ ,  $p < .01$  (Model 3), in support of Hypothesis 6. A visual representation of the

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### A. Social interaction on the interpersonal justice–relational conflict relationship



### B. Social interaction on the relational conflict–commitment to change relationship

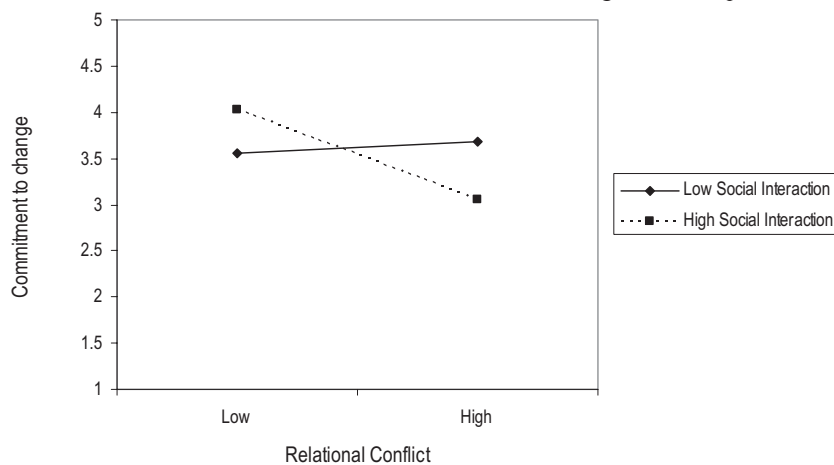


FIGURE 2. Moderating effects.

interaction effect (Figure 2B) and simple slope analysis revealed that when social interaction was high, the negative relationship between relational conflict and commitment to change was stronger,  $t = -3.63$ ,  $p < .001$ , than when social interaction was low,  $t = .69$ ,  $p = .49$ .

As we noted previously, we followed Preacher et al. (2007) and Edwards and Lambert (2007) to test for the moderated mediation effect suggested by

TABLE 3  
Comparison of Simple Effects at High and Low Levels of Social Interaction,  
N = 77

	<i>Direct effect of interpersonal justice on relational conflict</i>	<i>Direct effect of relational conflict on commitment to change</i>	<i>Total indirect effect (Edwards &amp; Lambert, 2007)</i>	<i>Total indirect effect (Preacher et al., 2007)</i>
High social interaction (+1SD)	-.56***	-.82**	.46**	.45**
Low social interaction (-1SD)	-.28	.12	-.03	-.02
Difference (high versus low social interaction)	.28*	.94***	.49**	.47**

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ .

Hypothesis 7. First, using Preacher et al.'s (2007) SPSS "modmed" macro and its bootstrapping function, we computed bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) at two selected levels of social interaction, with 5,000 random samples and replacement from the full sample (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). The bootstrap 95 per cent CI of the conditional effect that was one standard deviation above the mean (3.45) did not contain 0 [.16, .80]; the conditional, indirect effect of interpersonal justice on commitment to change was significant at  $p < .05$ . The replication of this procedure for the value below the mean (1.95) produced a CI that included 0 [-.20, .16], so the conditional indirect effect of interpersonal justice was not significantly different from 0 at this lower level of social interaction.

Second, to corroborate these results, we ran the SPSS "Constrained Non-linear Regression" syntax module suggested by Edwards and Lambert (2007), which also was based on bootstrapping and assessed the strength of (a) the direct effect of interpersonal justice on relational conflict, (b) the direct effect of relational conflict on commitment to change, and (c) the indirect effect of interpersonal justice on commitment to change through relational conflict, at high and low levels of social interaction (see also Ho and Gupta, 2012). The results, in Table 3, revealed that when social interaction was high (+1 SD), the paths from interpersonal justice to relational conflict ( $\beta = -.56, p < .001$ ) and from relational conflict to commitment to change ( $\beta = -.82, p < .01$ ) were both negative and significant; their combined indirect effect was positive and significant (.46,  $p < .01$ ). When social interaction was low (-1 SD), both direct paths were insignificant ( $\beta = -.28, ns$ ;  $\beta = .12, ns$ , respectively), which resulted in a non-significant indirect effect

( $\beta = -.03$ , *ns*).<sup>3</sup> The indirect effects derived from Edwards and Lambert's (2007) method aligned with those that we calculated using Preacher et al.'s (2007) approach, that is, .45 ( $p < .01$ ) for high and  $-.02$  (*ns*) for low social interaction (Table 3). Overall, the results suggested that the indirect effect of interpersonal justice on commitment to change, through relational conflict, was stronger when social interaction was higher, in support of Hypothesis 7.

## DISCUSSION

### Theoretical Implications

With this research, we have applied Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002) to achieve a better understanding of employees' commitment to change, considering the roles of two key dimensions of relational quality in employee-supervisor dyads, fairness (interpersonal justice) and intensity (social interaction), as well as the personality clashes that might occur, as reflected in relational conflict. These issues have received relatively limited attention in prior research into commitment to change (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Choi, 2011). We tested our conceptual framework with a sample of employees who were directly affected by a large-scale change in their organisation (i.e. core change recipients). Large-scale changes such as restructuring usually elicit different reactions among employees, depending on how they are personally affected by the change, but this distinction gets ignored by research that features non-core change recipients (Bouckennooghe, 2010; Oreg et al., 2011). By focusing on employees who were pivotal to successful change implementation, we provided a more accurate picture of relational dynamics in the emergence of commitment to change.

Interpersonal justice positively affected commitment to change; we further unpacked this effect by revealing a mediating role of relational conflict and a moderating role of social interaction. First, relational conflict offered an important missing link between interpersonal justice and commitment to change. The effect of interpersonal justice disappeared when we accounted for the role of relational conflict. The threat of interpersonal conflict looms large in change situations (Raza & Standing, 2011) and is particularly likely when employees cannot draw from relevant relational resources in their relationships with their supervisor, such as when they experience unfair treatment (Hobfoll, 2002). Our study has shown that reducing this threat is critical to building positive attitudes toward organisational change. The

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<sup>3</sup> These total indirect effects, based on Edwards and Lambert's (2007) approach, result from the product terms of the paths from interpersonal justice to relational conflict and from relational conflict to commitment to change.

reduction of relational conflict functioned as a key mediating mechanism by which fair employee treatment increased commitment to change.

Second, by responding to calls for more context-bound work on the role of fairness in organisational change (Oreg et al., 2011), we showed how this mediating effect is moderated by the strength of the social interactions between employees and supervisors. Social interaction and associated communication quality (Larkin & Larkin, 1994) invigorated the beneficial role of high interpersonal justice in diminishing relational conflict, and the reduced relational conflict in turn translated into a stronger commitment to change when the details of that change were explained more clearly through social interactions (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). However, for relationships with low interpersonal justice, social interactions played a dysfunctional role. These interactions made employees more aware of their unfair treatment and triggered relational conflict (Hobfoll, 2002; Murnighan & Conlon, 1991); the negative emotions that came with relational conflict in turn were more easily activated into a lower commitment to change when interactions with the supervisor were more personal and informal (De Clercq et al., 2009).<sup>4</sup>

In all, this study highlights the role of hitherto underexplored facets of relationship quality—interpersonal justice, social interaction, and relational conflict—when it comes to employees' ability to cope with the stress and anxiety that accompany organisational change. In the process of change implementation, interpersonal disagreements inevitably arise between change recipients and their supervisors (Raza & Standing, 2011); we pinpoint such relational conflict as a critical conduit through which fair treatments, or the lack thereof, inform commitment to change. Yet the greatest insight of this study may be our identification of the dual role of social interaction. Extant COR theory emphasises the role of relational resources in helping employees cope with stressful situations (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002); our study specifies that these resources are not just generic but rather require a careful consideration of the possible interplay between relevant underlying dimensions, such as the fairness and intensity of employee–supervisor exchanges. Social interaction is beneficial in its ability to leverage fair relationships into enhanced commitment to change, by reducing relational conflict, but it also reinforces the relational strain that is present when such fairness is lacking

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<sup>4</sup> The absence of a significant correlation between relational conflict and social interaction ( $r = -.02$ , *ns*) underlines the presence of two distinct features of employee–supervisor relationships, as well as the need for further investigations of their simultaneous effects on commitment to change. Conceptually, the notion of social interaction differs from that of relational conflict: The former represents a relational resource embedded in exchange relationships (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), whereas the latter captures disagreements or tensions in such relationships (Jehn, 1995). Thus, social interaction might increase or decrease relational conflict, though our focus is on how the *concurrent* interplay between the two influences commitment to change.



(Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to show that the widely assumed benefits of strong relationship building for commitment to change actually are not universal (Bouckennooghe, 2010; Ford et al., 2008; Oreg et al., 2011); rather, strong relationships are destructive if they activate and reinforce the negative emotions that stem from perceived unfairness. Thus, even if employees who are treated unfairly may be reluctant to interact with their supervisors frequently—as is manifest in the positive correlation between interpersonal justice and social interaction ( $r = .46, p < .001$ )—we show that the *concurrent* presence of unfair treatments and strong social interaction decreases the likelihood of strong commitment to change. In that case, the resource reservoir from which employees can draw becomes further depleted (Bouckennooghe, 2010; Hobfoll, 1989), and the negative impact of unfair treatments on commitment to change through relational conflict is invigorated.

## Limitations and Future Research Directions

We acknowledge that our study had some limitations that offer opportunities for further research. First, we collected data from only one side of the employee-supervisor dyad. Therefore, it is not clear whether the two parties shared the same opinions about different aspects of their relationship. Further research could assess the study's focal constructs from the perspective of both parties—particularly how differences in their perceptions might influence employee attitudes toward change.

Second, our focus on commitment to change by the change recipient (employee) ignored the level of such commitment by the change agent (supervisor), and particularly how the two might affect each other (Bouckennooghe, 2010; Ford et al., 2008; Oreg et al., 2011). For example, change recipients often rely on role models within the organisation to determine their own attitudes (Ford et al., 2008). If employees receive fair interpersonal treatment from supervisors, they should identify with them more strongly (Festinger, 1954; Goethals & Darley, 1977). Therefore, supervisors who are highly committed to a change may fuel similar reactions among their subordinates, and vice versa. In this regard, further research could adopt multilevel approaches to compare change-related attitudes at individual versus dyadic levels (Hitt, Beamish, Jackson, & Mathieu, 2007; Oreg et al., 2011).

Third, we did not have complete control over the selection of potential participants by supervisors, so there may be some bias associated with our data collection. However, if the employees surveyed were all strongly in favor of the change, the variance available in the data would have fallen, increasing the threshold for finding significant results. Still we found support for all our hypotheses, so such bias probably was not a critical concern.

Fourth, the relatively small sample size might be a weakness, in light of the general preference in social sciences to draw conclusions from larger samples because of the associated higher statistical power. However, smaller sample sizes provide for a more conservative statistical test of theoretical relationships; our finding of significant interaction effects corroborated the validity of our conceptual framework.

Fifth, to reduce concerns about common method variance, we assessed commitment to change at a later point in time than the other focal constructs. Yet the other variables were collected at the same point in time, so it was not possible to examine possible time-variant relationships between the different facets of employee–supervisor relationships. For example, we were unable to draw causal inferences about the relationship between interpersonal justice and social interaction. Although our conceptual model focused on the moderating impact of social interaction, it might well be that there are unexplored causal relationships, such that higher levels of interpersonal injustice lead to lower social interaction, or alternatively, that the presence of strong social interactions may inform employees' perceptions of how fairly they are treated by their supervisor. Longitudinal studies that investigate conceptual models similar to the one we proposed could include multiple waves, to provide a more precise account of such causal relationships (Singer & Willett, 2003).

## Practical Implications

This study has important implications for change management. In particular, insofar as relational conflict between employees and supervisors is nearly inherent to organisational change, it must be taken seriously by management as a potential deterrent to employee buy-in to change. Relational conflict brings about negative emotions, typical by-products of any change situation (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003); organisations should anticipate the occurrence of such conflict and attempt to prevent it by demanding fair treatment by supervisors. It is well established that during the implementation of significant changes, such as restructuring, change agents must provide transparent descriptions of what the change involves, including the benefits and risks for those affected (e.g. Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Bastien, 1987; Bernerth, 2004). Thus, management should openly communicate about the change and develop procedures to ensure fair treatment of all parties (Cobb et al., 1995; Russ, 2008; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991). Complementing these insights, our study suggests that management should also acknowledge the *relational* side of change implementation by helping employees cope with the emotional underpinnings of personal clashes (Jehn & Mannix, 2001), treating them with dignity and respect (Colquitt, 2001), and facilitating strong social

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interactions to exploit such positive treatments (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

The findings also provide insights into selection criteria that organisations undergoing large-scale changes can use to build and maintain a workforce that is strongly committed to those changes. In particular, it is important to hire leaders who treat their employees fairly and are willing to go out of their way to maintain strong informal relationships with them. Because both relationship qualities must be present simultaneously to generate positive outcomes, this hiring policy should be backed up with an appropriate work climate, such as a family-like culture (Cameron & Quinn, 1999), that effectively combines relationship fairness with intensity, through levers such as open communication and trust.

Management should be also aware that strong social interactions can backfire in the *absence* of fair employee treatment, such that personal clashes not only are more likely to emerge, but the negative emotions (e.g. frustration, anxiety) that come with them are more easily triggered, further reducing employees' commitment to change (De Clercq et al., 2009; Jehn et al., 1999). Unless employees and supervisors can resolve the causes of interpersonal arguments and disagreements, more social interactions cannot eliminate the harmful effects of limited fairness and the resulting relational conflict. Instead, negative feelings associated with conflict may grow even more pronounced. Accordingly, management should realise that in some situations—such as when dramatic crises in the company's history preclude perceptions of fair treatment or the resolution of relational conflicts—it may be better to discourage informal interactions between employees and their supervisors, to prevent the escalation of unfavorable feelings that may lead to more personal animosity and ultimately diminish employees' commitment to change.

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## APPENDIX

### Survey Items

*Affective commitment* (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

- I believe in the value of this restructuring.
- The restructuring is a good strategy for this organisation.
- I think that management is making a mistake by going ahead with this restructuring. (R)
- This restructuring serves an important purpose.
- Things would be better without this restructuring. (R)
- This restructuring is not necessary. (R)

*Interpersonal justice* (1 = not at all; 5 = to a large extent)

- To what extent was your supervisor respectful of you when discussing the new changes that resulted from this restructuring?
- To what extent did your supervisor treat you with dignity during this restructuring?

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- To what extent was your supervisor polite in his/her treatment toward you during the implementation of this restructuring?
- To what extent did your supervisor refrain from improper remarks or comments during the change process?

*Relational conflict* (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

- During the restructuring, there were often tensions in the relationship between my supervisor and me.
- During the implementation of this change, I often got angry at my supervisor.
- I didn't get along that well with my supervisor during the change process.
- My supervisor and I often had a hard time communicating with each other during the implementation of this change.

*Social interaction* (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

- My supervisor and I spend significant time together in social situations.
- I maintain a close social relationship with my supervisor.
- The relationship with my supervisor is very informal.
- I know my supervisor on a personal level and vice versa.

*Note:* (R) = reverse coded.



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